

Message Text

PAGE 01 STATE 080340
ORIGIN IO-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /015 R

66011
DRAFTED BY:IO/UNA:BJSHARP
APPROVED BY:IO/UNA:AFHOLLOWAY
-----018754 290600Z /21
O 290439Z MAR 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY LAGOS IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 080340

FOR AMBASSADOR YOUNG FROM UNA

FOLLOWING REPEAT ADDIS AVABA 1399 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO
BERLIN CAIRO DJIBOUTI JIDDA KHARTOUM MOGADISCIO MOSCOW
NARIOBI SANA TEHRAN TRIPOLI USUN NEW YORK USNATO HAVANA
USCINCEUR CINCPAC MAR 27.
QUOTE S E C R E T ADDIS ABABA 1399

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, ET
SUBJ: PROSPECTS FOR ERITREA

SUMMARY AND COMMENT: WITH OGADEN CONFLICT WINDING DOWN
AND SHIFTING FROM WARFARE TO REHABILITATION, IT IS CER-
TAIN THAT PROVISIONAL MILITARY ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL
(PMAC OR DIRG) WILL TURN ITS FULL ATTENTION TO ERITREA.
ETHIOPIA'S REDIRECTION TOWARD RESOLUTION OF ERITREAN
PROBLEM WILL FOCUS INTERNATIONAL CONCERN ON FATE OF ERI-
TREAN POPULATION AND ON STRATEGIC VALUE OF ETHIOPIA'S
RED SEA COASTLINE. DEVELOPMENTS THERE WILL PLACE IN-
CREASING PRESSURE ON USG TO FORMULATE A POLICY WHICH
BALANCES THE COMPETING INTERESTS IN AREA, OR AT LEAST
TO TAKE MORE FORTHRIGHT STAND THAN CURRENT VAGUE POSI-
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TION IN SUPPORT OF UNSPECIFIED NEGOTIATED SOLUTION OF
PROBLEM. CARDINAL AFRICAN PRINCIPLE OF TERRITORIAL
INTEGRITY WILL AGAIN BE BASIS OF DIRG POLICY TOWARD
ERITREA AS IT WAS IN OGADEN, AND WILL BE JUSTIFICA-
TION FOR FUTURE ACTIONS. LACK OF WILLINGNESS ON PART
OF BOTH ETHIOPIANS AND ERITREANS TO NEGOTIATE SUBSTAN-
TIVELY WITH EACH OTHER APPEARS TO DICTATE A MILITARY,
RATHER THAN POLITICAL OR NEGOTIATED SOLUTION TO PROBL-
LEM. MILITARY SITUATION FOR EPMG IN ERITREA HAS STA-
BILIZED SOMEWHAT OVER PAST SIX WEEKS, IN SPITE OF HEAVY

ETHIOPIAN COMMITMENTS ON OGADEN FRONT, AND IN SOME CASES HAS IMPROVED. CONTINUING INABILITY OF VARIOUS ERITREAN GROUPS TO REACH UNIFICATION, POSSIBILITY OF DECREASED ARMS SUPPLIES, AND FAILURE TO CAPTURE ANY MORE MAJOR STRATEGIC TOWNS HELD BY ETHIOPIANS SINCE KEREN FELL IN AUG 77 DO NOT AUGUR WELL FOR FUTURE OF ERITREAN SECESSIONISTS. WITH THESE PROSPECTS IN MIND, EMBASSY BELIEVES FUTURE USG POLICY MIGHT INCLUDE FOLLOWING ASPECTS: CRITICISM OF FOREIGN TROOP INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNAL ETHIOPIAN AFFAIR, WITH EYE TOWARD GAINING SUPPORT OF AFRICANS, PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST CIVILIAN POPULATION, SUPPORT FOR ETHIOPIA'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, AND PRIVATE CONSULTATIONS WITH SOVIETS AND CUBANS AS TO POLITICAL COSTS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN ERITREA.

END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

1. ALTHOUGH OGADEN FIGHTING IS APPARENTLY OVER FOR PRESENT, SITUATION IN HORN WILL CONTINUE TO BE VOLATILE AND SOMEWHAT UNSTABLE. ONE MAJOR SOURCE OF INSTABILITY WILL BE SHIFT OF DIRG ATTENTION TO ERITREA AND ALMOST CERTAIN LIKELIHOOD OF FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT.

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EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT, HAVING SUCCEEDED IN OGADEN USING METHODOICAL SOVIET STRATEGY AND COMMAND LOGISTICS, EPMG COUNTS ON USING SIMILAR TACTICS FOR ERITREA, NOTWITHSTANDING MORE FORMIDABLE CHALLENGE OF GUERRILLA WAR, BACKED ALMOST TO A MAN BY ERITREAN POPULATION. FRENCH MILATT, WHO HAS BEEN FAIRLY RELIABLE IN PREDICTING ETHIOPIAN MILITARY INTENTIONS IN PAST, STATED THAT HE BELIEVES ETHIOPIANS ARE COMMITTED TO GRADUAL BUILDUP OF FORCES IN ERITREA LEADING TO INTENSIFIED MILITARY CAMPAIGN AGAINST SECESSIONISTS. PUBLIC MESSAGE FROM NORTHERN FRONT FORCES TO EASTERN AND SOUTHERN FORCES AFTER SOMALI WITHDRAWAL ALSO INDICATES COMMITMENT TO MILITARY SOLUTION. "WE PLEDGE AND DECLARE WE WILL AT ANY COST EMANCIPATE OPPRESSED NATIONALITIES IN ERITREA...AND MAKE OUR COMRADES ON EASTERN FRONT HAPPY WITH GLORIOUS VICTORY OVER THE PUPPETS OF DECADENT ARAB REGIMES AND IMPERIALISM."

2. DESPITE PUBLIC ASSURANCES BY CUBAN VP RODRIGUEZ THAT CUBAN FORCES WILL NOT BE USED TO SOLVE INTERNAL ETHIOPIAN PROBLEM, IT IS ALMOST CERTAIN THAT SOVIETS WILL BEND TO ETHIOPIAN PRESSURES TO "ASSIST" IN SOLVING ERITREAN PROBLEMS, EVEN IF RELUCTANTLY. SOME SUSPICIONS ABOUT SOVIET MOTIVES AND INTENTIONS PERSIST AMONG ETHIOPIANS BECAUSE OF SOVIET ASSURANCES LAST YEAR THAT SOMALIS WOULD NOT INVADE. RESIDENT SOVIET AMB ASSERTED AS LATE AS DEC 77 THAT ETHIOPIAN

DISTRUST OF SOVIETS HAD NOT YET BEEN DISSIPATED, AND THIS HAMPERED SOVIET ABILITY TO INFLUENCE ETHIOPIANS TO DIVERGE FROM LATTER'S PERCEIVED INTERESTS. WE THEREFORE BELIEVE SOVIETS ARE LIKELY TO "PERSUADE" CUBANS TO COOPERATE WITH ETHIOPIANS IN ERITREA IN AN EFFORT TO MAINTAIN AND BUILD CONFIDENCE OF DIRG TOWARD THEMSELVES IN SHORT TERM. FRENCH MILATT HAS SPECULATED THAT CUBANS AND SOVIETS WILL BECOME DEEPLY INVOLVED IN ERITREA, ALSO NOTING THAT IT WILL BE WITH SOME RELUC-
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TANCE.

3. DIRG HAS TAKEN VARIOUS RECENT DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES TO NEUTRALIZE SUPPORT FOR ERITREAN CAUSE AMONG LATTER'S TRADITIONAL MILITARY SUPPLIERS. ALGERIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN MOHAMMED MESSAOUD KELLOU VISITED ADDIS ABABA MAR 6 WITH SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM PRES. BOUMEDIENNE, FOLLOWING PREVIOUS VISIT TO ALGERIA BY DIRG STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBER. LOCAL MEDIA REPORTS INDICATED AT THE TIME THAT ALGERIA WAS PREPARED TO SUPPORT ETHIOPIAN GOVT (EPMG) IF IT WOULD IN TURN BACK ALGERIAN POSITION ON WESTERN SAHARA. KEY ISSUE IN ERITREA AND WESTERN SAHARA IN ETHIO-ALGERIAN VIEW IS OAU PRINCIPLE OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY UPON WHICH THERE IS BASIS FOR MUTUALLY-BENEFICIAL TRADE-OFF.

4. ETHIOPIA'S FLIRTATION WITH LIBYA OVER PAST YEAR ORIGINALLY APPEARED TO BE DESIGNED TO TRADE OFF LIBYAN FINANCIAL AND MILITARY MATERIEL SUPPORT FOR ETHIOPIAN SUPPORT AGAINST SUDAN'S NIMEIRI. IT WAS ALSO EXPECTED BY ETHIOPIANS THAT PART OF TRADE-OFF WOULD BE WITHHOLDING OF LIBYAN SUPPORT TO ERITREANS. HOWEVER, LIBYA'S GROWING RAPPROCHMENT WITH SUDAN, HER FAILURE TO PROVIDE KIND OF CASH EPMG HOPED FOR, HER APPARENT SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT ERITREA, AND HER OBVIOUS DILEMMA OVER HOW TO TAKE SIDES IN OGADEN WAR HAVE ALL SERVED TO TEMPER BILATERAL FRIENDSHIP WHICH WAS DEVELOPING RAPIDLY LAST YEAR AND TO CAUSE ETHIOPIA SERIOUSLY TO QUESTION LIBYAN INTENTIONS. ETHIOPIANS REMAIN WARY THAT COL. QADHAFI MAY YET AGAIN SWITCH TO SUPPORT OF ERITREANS, DESPITE SOVIET REPRESENTATIONS ON BEHALF OF ETHIOPIANS.

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5. IMMINENT OPENING OF PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION (PLO) OFFICE IN ADDIS ABABA IS ANOTHER ASPECT OF DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO DIMINISH SUPPORT TO ERITREANS. HOWEVER, EVENTS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON MAY OF THEMSELVES

VIRTUALLY ELIMINATE ANY SIGNIFICANT PLO MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO ERITREANS FOR AT LEAST COMING YEAR. THERE ARE ALSO REPORTS OF STRONG SOVIET PRESSURE ON BOTH SYRIANS AND IRAQIS TO HALT ASSISTANCE THEY HAVE PROVIDED ERITREANS IN PAST, WHICH MAY BE HAVING SOME IMPACT. PREVIOUS CUBAN AND SOUTH YEMEN (PDRY) SUPPORT TO ERITREANS NATURALLY HAS CEASED COMPLETELY, AND PDRY COMBAT ROLE ON EPMG SIDE HAS BEEN DOCUMENTED FREQUENTLY IN RECENT MONTHS. SUDAN HAS LONG SINCE DROPPED KIND OF REFERENCES NIMEIRI WAS MAKING LAST YEAR ABOUT AN INDEPENDENT ERITREA AND IS EVEN REPORTEDLY ON VERGE OF THREATENING TO CLOSE ITS TERRITORY TO ERITREANS AS TRANSIT POINT FOR SUPPLIES IN ORDER TO FORCE NEGOTIATIONS WITH EPMG. EGYPT, TOO, REPORTEDLY HAS CONSIDERED IMPLICATIONS OF INDEPENDENT ERITREA IN CONTEXT OF OTHER AFRICAN INTERESTS AND RECOGNITION THAT MILITANT MARXIST-LENINIST STATE ALONG RED SEA SEEMS INEVITABLE, NO MATTER WHAT IS FINAL OUTCOME OF INSURGENCY.

6. AWARE THAT TRADITIONAL MILITARY SUPPLIERS ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY RELUCTANT TO PROVIDE MILITARY ASSISTANCE, ERITREANS HAVE TURNED TO CONSERVATIVE ARAB COUNTRIES MOST STRONGLY OPPOSED TO MENGISTU AND TO SOVIET/CUBAN INVOLVEMENT, WHO COINCIDENTALLY ARE PERCEIVED AS CLOSE COLLABORATORS OF US. SAME ACCUSATIONS RAISED AGAINST SAUDIS, OMANIS, PAKISTANIS, IRANIS, EGYPTIANS, AND EVEN JORDANIANS IN OGADEN CONFLICT MAY BE VOICED AGAIN IN ERITREA. SOVIETS AND THEIR ALLIES CAN BE EXPECTED TO CO-OPERATE BY LOCKING ETHIOPIA MORE FIRMLY WITHIN RANKS OF ITS "RADICAL" THIRD WORLD ALLIES.

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7. AS WAR SITUATION INTENSIFIES IN ERITREA, ERITREAN PROPAGANDA MILL IS LIKELY TO HIGHLIGHT INTERNATIONALIZATION OF CONFLICT, AS WELL AS "GENOCIDAL" ATROCITIES AGAINST CIVILIAN POPULATION. VOCAL ERITREAN LOBBIES IN US, UK, FRG, SWEDEN, FRANCE AND CANADA COULD HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON PUBLIC OPINION SIMILAR TO THAT DURING NIGERIAN (BIAFRA) CIVIL WAR. PRESSURE ON THESE GOVTS TO "DO SOMETHING" TO PREVENT GROSS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND TO FORCE "FOREIGN ADVISORS" TO LEAVE ERITREA WILL BE MUCH GREATER THAN IN OGADEN. AFTER ALL, NO OUTSIDE AGGRESSION IS INVOLVED. ETHIOPIAN CASE FOR EXTERNAL INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIR IF ISSUE EVER REACHES UN, IS NOT PARTICULARLY STRONG, GIVEN QUESTIONABLE LEGALITY OF HER ACTION IN ABOLISHING FEDERATED STATUS IN 1962. GROWING PROSPECT THAT EPMG WILL SUCCEED IN ASSERTING FULL CONTROL OVER ALL OF ETHIOPIAN TERRITORY, THANKS TO SOVIET AND CUBAN ASSISTANCE, WILL AROUSE WIDESPREAD APPREHENSION AMONG MID-EAST COUNTRIES.

8. USG ESPECIALLY MAY BE SORELY PRESSED TO BALANCE HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AND ARAB INTERESTS IN REGION ON ONE HAND AGAINST POSSIBLE CHARGES OF INTERFERENCE IN ETHIOPIA'S DOMESTIC AFFAIRS AND EVER-PRESENT AFRICAN CONCERN FOR MAINTAINING TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, NO MATTER WHAT THE COST, ON THE OTHER. (RESIDENT NIGERIAN DIPLOMAT, DRAWING PARALLEL TO BIAFRA, STATED THAT HIS COUNTRY SUPPORT ETHIOPIAN POSITION ON ERITREA, I.E., THAT IT WAS INTERNAL CONFLICT TO BE SOLVED BY ETHIOPIANS WITHIN PRINCIPLE OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY. IT IS PROBABLY THAT THIS WILL BE INTERPRETATION OF MANY OAU MEMBER STATES.) OAU HAS NEVER RECOGNIZED ANY OF
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ERITREAN LIBERATION GROUPS, FURTHER WEAKENING ERITREAN CAUSE WITHIN AFRICAN CONTEXT. AT SAME TIME, HOWEVER, MANY OF SAME AFRICAN STATES CAN HARDLY BE AS COMPLACENT ABOUT LIKELIHOOD OF SOVIET-CUBAN MILITARY ROLE IN ERITREA, WHICH ROLE IS NOT DEFENSIBLE, AS THEY WERE ABOUT MILITARY ROLE IN OGADEN, WHICH WAS DEFENSIBLE ON TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY GROUNDS.

9. ERITREAN MILITARY SUCCESSES TO DATE HAVE LED MANY ASMARA RESIDENTS TO BELIEVE THAT SECESSIONISTS COULD CAPTURE CITY FROM ETHIOPIAN FORCES IF THEY "REALLY WANTED TO". AVAILABLE EVIDENCE CONTRADICTS THIS ASSUMPTION AND IN FACT INDICATES THAT MILITARY FORTUNES SHOULD BEGIN TO DECLINE FOR ERITREANS AND IMPROVE FOR ETHIOPIANS. RELIABLE ERITREANS SOURCE STATED ETHIOPIANS WERE ABLE TO RECAPTURE TOWN OF SALADRO (10KM SMEGB) MID-FEBRUARY.

WESTERN GARRISON OF BARENTU, ALTHOUGH CUT OFF BY ROAD FOR PAST YEAR AND ALLEGEDLY ENCIRCLED BY ELF, HAS NOT BEEN SERIOUSLY THREATENED. INITIAL ATTACKS ON MASSAWA HAVE BEEN REPULSED, REPORTEDLY AT GREAT LOSS TO BOTH SIDES, AND METHODOICAL PLANNING IS SUPPOSEDLY UNDERWAY TO BREAK SIEGE OF TOWN WITH HELP OF ETHIOPIA'S UNCHALLENGED AIR SUPERIORITY. ASSAB HAS NOT EXPERIENCED ANY MAJOR ATTACKS, NOR DOES IT APPEAR THAT IT WILL. IN SUDAN BORDER AREA OF WESTERN ERITREAN TERRAIN IS SIMILAR TO SOME AREAS OF OGADEN AND QUITE SUITABLE FOR CONVENTIONAL WARFARE. INTERDICTING SECESSIONIST SUPPLY ROUTES FROM SUDAN MIGHT BE PRIORITY MILITARY OBJECTIVE, AS IT WAS LAST JUNE-JULY, UNTIL OGADEN WAR DIVERTED ETHIOPIAN ATTENTION. REPORTS BY RECENT RETURNEES FROM ERITREAN HAVE INDICATED SERIOUS DIFFERENCES PERSIST BETWEEN SECESSIONIST GROUPS IN FIELD, LEADING IN SOME CASES TO ARMED CLASHES. DESPITE EXPECTED INTENSIFICATION OF ETHIOPIAN CAMPAIGN AGAINST GUERRILLAS BEFORE LONG, ERITREANS SHOW NO SENSE OF URGENCY OR GREAT IN-
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CLINATION TO MOVE TOWARD UNIFICATION.

10. COMPLEXITY OF COMPETING USG POLICY INTERESTS
RAISED BY ERITREAN PROBLEM AND EXPECTED SOVIET/CUBAN
INVOLVEMENT IN RESOLUTION OF PROBLEM, MAY BE YET
ANOTHER SEVERE TEST OF US ABILITY TO RESIST CONFRONTA-
TION WITH SOVIETS IN AFRICA, AND DESIRE NOT TO ALIENATE
IMPORTANT AFRICAN COUNTRIES AT EXPENSE OF OTHER US IN-
TERESTS. WHILE USG HAS CONSIDERED IN PAST IDEA OF
INFORMING ETHIOPIANS THAT WE MIGHT BE WILLING TO EXERT
SOME PRESSURE ON ERITREAN SUPPORTERS IN AREA WITH WHOM
WE HAVE DEGREE OF INFLUENCE IN EXCHANGE FOR DECREASED SOVIET/CUBAN RO-
LE
IN ETHIOPIA, THAT NO LONGER APPEARS
REALISTIC BECAUSE OF APPARENT ETHIOPIAN READINESS TO
USE FOREIGN "ADVISORS" IN ERITREA. POSSIBILITY OF
RAISING ERITREAN ISSUE AT UN BASED UPON PRECEDENT THAT
IT WAS ONCE UN RESPONSIBILITY, MAY BE FRUITLESS ALSO
IF STRONGLY OPPOSED BY AFRICAN STATES. (AT TIME OF
ESTABLISHMENT OF FEDERATION IN 1950-52 US STRONGLY
SUPPORTED UN ACTIONS WHILE SOVIETS OPPOSED THEM.)
ETHIOPIANS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY ARGUE THAT NATIONAL DEMO-
CRATIC REVOLUTIONARY (NDR) PROGRAM AND MAY 1976 NINE-
POINT ERITREAN PEACE POLICY PROVIDE FOR THEIR RESOLU-
TION OF PROBLEM AND REGIONAL AUTONOMY FOR ERITREANS
WITHOUT UNASKED-FOR OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE FROM ANYONE.

11. EMBASSY RECOMMENDATIONS: US SHOULD CONTINUE TO
SPEAK OUT FORCEFULLY AGAINST SUBSTANTIATED HUMAN RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS AGAINST CIVILIAN POPULATION IN THE FUTURE,
BUT CAREFULLY DIFFERENTIATE THIS FROM MILITARY ACTIONS
TAKEN AGAINST GUERRILLAS. US SHOULD ALSO CONTINUE TO
BE CRITICAL OF FOREIGN TROOP INVOLVEMENT IN ERITREA
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WITH OBJECTIVE OF GAINING SOME AFRICAN SUPPORT AND POS-
SIBLE OAU CONDEMNATION OF EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT IN IN-
TERNAL ETHIOPIAN AFFAIR. CRITICAL PUBLIC STATEMENTS
SHOULD BE BALANCED BY US SUPPORT FOR ETHIOPIA'S TERRI-
TORIAL INTEGRITY. US SHOULD NOT GIVE APPEARANCE OF
MILITARILY ASSISTING SECESSIONISTS NOR ENCOURAGE OUR
FRIENDS TO DO SO EITHER. TO DO ANYTHING ELSE WOULD
PLACE US IN SHARP CONTRAST WITH OUR PREVIOUS POLICY
TOWARD ZAIRE/SHABA PROVINCE AND MIGHT WELL EXPOSE US
TO CHARGES OF HYPOCRISY AND ONLY BEING CONCERNED ABOUT
COLD WAR CONFRONTATION. FINALLY, US SHOULD CONTINUE
TO ATTEMPT TO DEMONSTRATE PRIVATELY TO SOVIETS AND
CUBANS THAT COSTS OF MAJOR INVOLVEMENT IN ERITREA MAY
BE MORE THAN THEY ARE WILLING TO RISK.

12. EMBASSY WOULD WELCOME ADDRESSEE VIEWS ON ABOVE
PROBLEMS AS SEEN FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVES.

MATHERON

UNQUOTE COOPER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 26 sep 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, PROVINCE, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, DISSIDENT FACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE080340
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter:
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D780135-0962
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197803126/baaafcfz.tel
Line Count: 333
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 436e5ebb-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN IO
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3167274
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PROSPECTS FOR ERITREA
TAGS: PINS, ET
To: LAGOS
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/436e5ebb-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014